DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 451 HE 015 804

AUTHOR Epstein, Laura Mason; And Others
TITLE Couples in Transition: Relocation and Graduate School Influences on Development.
INSTITUTION California Univ., Berkeley.
PUB DATE 23 Aug 82
NOTE 8p.; Symposium presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Washington, DC, August 23, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Adult Development; Family Mobility; *Family Relationship; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; Life Satisfaction; *Married Students; Need Gratification; *Relocation; *Role Perception; *Self Concept; Spouses

ABSTRACT

Role satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and self-esteem of married graduate students were assessed with eight couples who relocated and eight couples who did not when one partner began graduate studies. Half of the couples were participants in the Couples in Transition Project at the University of California, Berkeley. The couples were administered the "Who Does What" (Cowan and Cowan) questionnare within a year and a half of beginning graduate school. Respondents rated how 36 household chores, family decisions, and child care tasks were divided by the couple and how they would like to see such responsibilities shared in the future. Role satisfaction was determined by the discrepancy between ratings for current versus desired division of labor for each task. Satisfaction with self, or self-esteem, was assessed with the Gough Adjective Checklist, and satisfaction with the couple relationship was assessed with the Locke Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test. Both men and women who relocated scored significantly lower on self-esteem than nonrelocatees. Couples who relocated tended to report less role satisfaction than couples who did not. Individuals in both groups, and especially the women, were significantly less satisfied with the way in which housework was shared than with the decision-making arrangements in their relationships. It is concluded that when one partner entered graduate school, both individuals experienced role dissatisfaction, and for those who relocated, there was lower self-esteem for both. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED225451

COUPLES IN TRANSITION: RELOCATION AND GRADUATE SCHOOL INFLUENCES ON DEVELOPMENT

Laura Mason Epstein
Sheila Namir
Ellen D. Nannis
Jay Paul

University of California, Berkeley, California

Discussants: Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip A. Cowan
University of California, Berkeley, California

Symposium presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August 23, 1982.
This research was funded, in part, by a grant from the Graduate Assembly of the University of California.

HE 015 804

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Laura Epstein
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

INFLUENCES OF A TRANSITION ON ROLE SATISFACTION, RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION & SELF-ESTEEM

Laura Mason and Jay Paul

University of California, Berkeley

Much of the theoretical and empirical literature on adult development has focused on the individual lifespan, ignoring the fact that most developmental transitions take place within a larger social system. Significant life changes on the individual level will affect the couple, just as changes for the couple as a unit will have an impact on the individual partners.

The model of couple relationships which informs our research follows the one developed by the Cowans in the Becoming a Family Project. This model suggests that each partner's self-concept and self-esteem, and the couple's role arrangements, role satisfaction, communication patterns, and the availability of social supports all interact to determine the quality of, and statisfaction with, the couple relationship.

This section of our presentation will focus on individual self-esteem, couple role arrangements and role satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction during a transitional period. By role arrangements, we mean the implicit or explicit decisions made by a couple with regard to the division of power, time, and tasks in the relationship. Many studies, using a variety of criterion measures, have found strong correlations between marital satisfaction and role satisfaction (Chadwick, Albrecht, and Kunz, 1976; Cowan and Cowan, 1981; Garrett, 1981), and between marital satisfaction and individual self-esteem (Awalt, 1982; H. Boles, 1981; Cowan and Cowan, 1981; Lewis and Spanier, 1979).

The transition reported on here may have particular effects on self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. Anxieties about success and performance in graduate school may influence the student's self-esteem and involvement in the couple relationship. The student partner becomes absorbed in study, and sometimes views time spent as a couple as an interruption from work that needs to get done. Graduate programs offer a new set of friends and associates to the student spouse, but the non-student (even when invited) may feel nothing in common with them. Because the pressures experienced by each partner are quite different and may not be understood by the other, partners may begin to feel that they live in different worlds. Consequently, satisfaction with the relationship may decrease.

For couples who relocate when one of the pair begins graduate school, the disequilibrium may be even greater, especially with regard to role arrangements. E.E. Le Masters (1978) has described general consequences of a major life change, such as relocation, for the family system: Roles are reassigned, status positions are shuffled, values are reoriented, and needs must be met through new channels. For couples who have moved to a new community, new individual and couple roles - as graduate student, student's mate, job hunter, and so on - must be integrated in the absence of a supportive environment which can facilitate this integration (Cowan, Cowan, Coie and Coie).

Sheila Namir mentioned the changes which accompany this relocation may place the non-student partner in a vulnerable position in terms of self-esteem and role satisfaction. The couple's decision to move may involve a deferral of the non-student mate's goals, as well as the loss of old friends or family. An unemployed non-student partner may be unprepared for the frustations and difficulties

of job-hunting in a new community. More time may be spent on household chores. If doing these chores is undesirable, and especially if an increase in household responsibility is accompanied by decreased time as a couple, there may be a corresponding drop in role satisfaction and self-esteem.

In an attempt to tease apart the separate contributions of entering graduate school and of relocation, we compared two groups: couples who did and did not relocate when one partner began graduate studies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants in this study were the eight couples from the Couples In Transition Project described by Sheila Namir. An additional eight couples who did not relocate were recruited from universities and professional schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. In this second group, the mean age of the men was 34 years (24-50) and of the women, 30 years (24-41). The average length of their relationships was four years. All individuals filled out the research questionnaires within a year and a half of beginning graduate school.

Instruments Role arrangements and role satisfaction were assessed with an instrument developed by the Cowans for their study of the transition to parenthood. The "Who Does What?" questionnaire asks each partner to rate how 36 household chores, family decisions, and childcare tasks are divided by the couple at the present time. The couples are also asked to rate how each partner would like to see such responsibilities shared in the future. Role satisfaction is determined by the discrepancy between ratings for current versus desired division of labor for each task.

Satisfaction with self, or self-esteem, was assessed with the Gough Adjective Checklist. Self-esteem is inferred from the discrepancy between present self and ideal self descriptions on eight subscales of the instrument.

Satisfaction with the couple relationship was assessed using the Locke Wallace Short Marital Adjustment Test. This provides a measure of each partner's global assessment of the couple relationship.

RESULTS

An analysis of variance was performed on all role satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and self-esteem scores obtained. As expected, both men and women who relocated scored significantly lower on self-esteem ($p < .05$) than men and women who did not relocate. Women in both groups obtained significantly lower self-esteem scores than men. These results are consistent with Sheila Namir's findings on the stressful nature of this transition.

Couples who relocated tended to report less role satisfaction than couples who did not relocate. With our small sample, this trend was at the .10 level, and suggests a need for further research with a larger sample. When role satisfaction is analyzed according to the nature of the task, individuals in both groups were significantly less satisfied with the ways in which housework is shared than with the decision making arrangements in their relationship. This was especially true for women.

Marital satisfaction showed no significant main effects for gender or relocation when measured within the first year-and-a-half of this transition.

We also correlated role satisfaction with marital satisfaction for the whole sample. These variables were uncorrelated for men, but for women, the higher

the satisfaction with household tasks, the greater the marital satisfaction (p less than .05, -.52).

Instead of dividing the sample by relocation or non-relocation, we compared students and non-students. There were no differences on any of our measures according to this variable.

DISCUSSION

Our results show that while relocation does add to the disequilibrium experienced by couples when one partner enters graduate school, it appears to be selective in its impact. The strong association between relocation and self-esteem may be a consequence of the loss of social supports and the need to adapt to new circumstances in a situation of relative isolation. And from discussions in our couples' groups, it appears that this transition does pull individual partners in different directions. The varying demands on each partner appear to require individual solutions. As questions about oneself and one's competence in a new environment arise, self-esteem seems to be affected.

Our results with regard to marital satisfaction and role satisfaction suggest that before the relationship as a whole is called into question, smaller day-to-day issues (such as who takes out the garbage or does the dishes) come up. These day-to-day issues are far from innocuous, however. Data from the Cowans' couples becoming first time parents show a connection between these issues and overall relationship satisfaction.

Discussion in our intervention groups may illuminate these findings further. Many individuals talked about the need to put their couple relationship on the back burner in order to cope with the demands of their daily lives. At the same time, they looked to their partners for the support needed to cope with the transition. Unless a major couple crisis developed, people appeared less likely to be sensitive to the changes occurring in their relationship.

It is important that we found differences between men and women in the areas of self-esteem and role satisfaction, but no significant differences based on student status. These results are complicated by the fact that among the couples who relocated, 7 of the 8 pairs were composed of a male student partner and a female nonstudent partner. In contrast, women were the students in half of the couples who did not relocate. Since the two groups cannot be differentiated by length of relationship, number of children, or age of individuals, we suspect that relocation for graduate school may not be as clear an option for women in relationships as it is for men. These gender differences in self-esteem and role satisfaction have been found in other studies of couple relationships; they may reflect real differences between men and women, or at least real differences in the ways in which men and women respond to these questionnaires.

Finally, how can we make sense of the fact that analyses of our data yielded no significant differences based on student status? It is possible that this lack of differences supports the position that the experiences and difficulties of one person in a pair have an impact on the other person and on the relationship; that is, there is an effect on the couple, even though at the moment there is no effect on marital satisfaction. When one partner in a couple enters graduate school, we found that both individuals experience role dissatisfaction, and for those who relocated, there is lower self-esteem for both. The issue is not, "Who is having the hardest time?", but rather that both individuals face challenges and experience disequilibrium. Often what happens in the transition described here

is that each partner lives through different kinds of adjustments, making the need for communication and understanding paramount. It is this need which may be met by projects such as Couples in Transition.

SELF ESTEEM SCORES

Analysis of variance:

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Relocation (A)	25878.12	1	25878.12	6.73 p .025
Within-Group Error (S/A)	53840.38	14	3845.74	
Gender (B)	11026.12	1	11026.12	5.13 p .05
Relocation x Gender Interaction (AxB)	60.51	1	60.51	1 n.s.
Gender x Within-Group Error (BxS/A)	30068.37	14	2147.74	

"WHO DOES WHAT" SCORES (WDW) - ROLE SATISFACTION

Analysis of variance:

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Relocation (A)	238.32	1	238.32	3.09 p .1
Within-Group Error (S/A)	1079.74	14	77.12	
Gender (B)	26.91	1	26.91	1.396 n.s.
Relocation x Gender Interaction (AxB)	2.85	1	2.85	1 n.s.
Gender x Within-Group Error (BxS/A)	269.8	14	19.27	
"Who Does What" Tasks (C)	427.97	1	427.97	10.16 p .0
Relocation x "Who Does What" Tasks (AxC)	2.85	1	2.85	1 n.s.
"Who Does What" Tasks x Within-Group Error (CxS/A)	589.74	14	42.12	
Gender x "Who Does What" Tasks Interaction (BxC)	89.07	1	89.07	5.16 p .0
Relocation x Gender x "Who Does What" Task Interaction (AxBxC)	6.56	1	6.56	1 n.s.
Gender x "Who Does What" Tasks x Within-Group Error (BxCxS/A)	241.44	14	17.25	

Simple Main Effects of Relocation and Gender on Role Satisfaction with Household Tasks:

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Relocation (A)	146.64	1	146.64	1.98 n.s.
Within-Group Error (S/A)	1035.79	14	73.99	
Gender	106.95	1	106.95	2.88 p .11 n.s.
Relocation x Gender Interaction (AxB)	0.38	1	0.38	1 n.s.
Gender x Within-Group Error (BxS/A)	519.79	14	37.13	

Simple Main Effects of Relocation and Gender on Role Satisfaction with Decision-Making:

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Relocation (A)	94.53	1	94.53	2.68 p .125 n.s.
Within-Group Error (S/A)	493.69	14	35.26	
Gender (B)	9.03	1	9.03	1 n.s.
Relocation x Gender Interaction (AxB)	9.03	1	9.03	1 n.s.
Gender Within-Group Error (BxS/A)	131.44	14	9.39	

MARITAL SATISFACTION SCORES

Source	SS	df	F
Relocation (A)	18	1	1 n.s.
Within-Group Error (S/A)	11466	14	
Gender (B)	288	1	1.77 n.s.
Relocation x Gender Interaction (AxB)	450	1	2.76 n.s. p .12
Gender x Within-Group Error (BxS/A)	2282	14	